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ABSTRACT

In 1996, Tennessee's Motlow State Community College (MSCC) participated in the American Association of Community Colleges' Exploring America's Communities project, which works to strengthen the instruction of American history, literature, and culture at U.S. community colleges. MSCC's goal is to introduce an understanding of cultural diversity which goes beyond tolerance to achieve acceptance. MSCC uses an integrated program of study which investigates, through both oral and written literature and historical records, the diversity present in its cultural community. MSCC's long-range goal is to produce an integrated Honors program which addresses, in an interdisciplinary fashion, the richness of local and national cultural heritage and the skills necessary to adapt to and profit from change. The prototype team-taught honors course was taught for the first time, operating from a syllabus which looks at change and value shifts in the past in order to develop sensitivity toward and acceptance of other cultures, particularly the Appalachian culture. Activities, such as trips, tours, guest speakers, a storytelling festival, workshops, and historical and literary readings were included in the class. Two specific obstacles faced by the college were difficulty in team-teaching two disciplines and covering the course's vast amount of material. Work remaining on the project is the sharpening of the focus of the American Studies course as well as the expansion of the Honors program. (HAA)

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# Motlow Community College Progress Report Exploring America's Communities: Honors American Studies

Motlow State Community College

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**PROGRESS REPORT**

**EXPLORING AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES**

**HONORS AMERICAN STUDIES**

(1) Motlow State Community College, established in 1969, is a small, rural-based entity whose student body reflects the population of its service area in Middle Tennessee, a population comprised predominantly of Appalachian, Anglo-Saxon Protestants. In the fall of 1996, Motlow enrolled 3,160 credit students and 35 non-credit students. Our students' family backgrounds and values tend to reflect the sub-culture of the region, including a resistance to change.

(2) While Motlow College offers courses in U.S. History Survey, English Composition, and U.S. Literature Survey, through our Action Plan to enhance teaching and learning about American pluralism and identity, we wish to engender in our students an integration of continuity and change through their own unique cultural community. All too many of our students have a narrow world view coupled with an ignorance of the diversity and richness of their native culture.

The goal of the college is to introduce an understanding which goes beyond tolerance to achieve acceptance. Our Action Plan is to be accomplished by an integrated program of study which will investigate, through both oral and written literature and historical records, the diversity originally present in our cultural community. By looking to the past and seeing how values have been formed, we will assist students in dealing with change and the concomitant shift in values change often brings.

Our long-range goal is to produce an integrated Honors program which addresses, in an interdisciplinary fashion, the richness of our

cultural heritage and the skills necessary to adapt to and profit from change. The lessons learned from this process will be shared with the larger student body through a more integrated curriculum.

Our prototype team-taught course, HON 201 and 202, was taught this fall for the first time. The course operates from a syllabus which looks at change and value shifts in the past in order to develop sensitivity toward and acceptance of other cultures. Issues covered in the class address the traditions of the area served by the college while exploring the cultural and historical diversity of the region. In other words, the course reveals how the predominantly Appalachian culture of our region mirrors in the microcosm the macrocosm of the American experience. Students discover through the distinctiveness of their own heritage the commonality of the threads that bind them to the broader American culture as they examine the "Story of Family"--personal, regional, and national.

(3) This course has succeeded in raising the awareness of our students concerning the cultural richness and diversity of our Appalachian heritage. Students have become aware that their region is not a backwater but is now, and always has been, involved in the mainstream of historic and cultural events. This course has emphasized the racial and cultural diversity represented by the three groups present in our region to 1876--black, red, and white.

Students have been involved in special events outside the classroom as part of this experience. In September the group spent three days visiting the birthplace of Sequoyah, the Oconoluftee Cherokee village where traditional lifestyles are carried on, the museum of the Cherokee Nation, Cades Cove, Smokemont Pioneer Village, and the Walker Sisters' Cabin. In November the class took a one-day tour of Franklin Battlefield, site of the bloodiest close combat in the west during the War Between The States, and paid visits to the historic Carter House, Lotz House, and Carnton. In December students had the opportunity to tour the Shiloh Battlefield. Guest speakers visited the class twice:

Mr. Bill Rust, who demonstrated Appalachian Dulcimers, and Mr. Brent Lokey, who presented a slide show on the campaigns of Lt. General Nathan Bedford Forrest.

The entire class was closely involved in the Motlow College Storytelling Festival, both in attending performance sessions and in participating in a workshop on how to tell stories. The workshop proved particularly valuable when, at the end of the semester, students portrayed a person from the past to "tell the story" of their history. Many students chose to portray members of their own families.

Students read both historical and literary material for each class meeting, and lectures were presented on occasion. However, the focus of each session was a seminar approach which encouraged conversation about diversity, commonality, and the American identity.

(4) Overwhelmingly, our students have expressed satisfaction with this course, often describing it as the best of their college experience. Both the instructors and the students, however, have become aware of two specific obstacles to be overcome to ensure the continuing success of the course. The first impediment was the difficulty encountered early on in team-teaching two disciplines. The instructors have experimented with ways to meld their different teaching styles/approaches and to integrate their materials, and we are meeting with better success in this area. The second obstacle continues to be the vast amount of material to be covered in the course. Since the course is designed to articulate as would our survey courses in American Literature and American History in addition to covering specific Appalachian materials, both the volume of reading and the class time required for lecture and discussion are proving to be excessive. For this coming semester, the instructors have devised an approach which will allow for a general survey of each time period to be covered (preceded by a reading list for background), followed by a more in-depth study of Appalachian material in relation to this broader national picture. In the future, it may be necessary to convert this course to elective credit and allow it to

become a purer study of Appalachian literature and history alone, with the background (national context) provided by prerequisites or corequisites of American Literature and American History.

(5) The work remaining on our project is to sharpen the focus of the American Studies course as explained above. In addition, we will continue to work toward our long-range goal of an expanded, interdisciplinary Honors Program by broadening the membership base and overall faculty involvement of our Honors Committee. We also plan to enrich our regular curriculum with some of the interdisciplinary materials and approaches that have proven successful, and to share our experiences with interested middle school and high school instructors in our service area.

(6) One particular example will serve to illustrate the synergy this class has developed around the topic of what it means to be an American. Two of our students, Kenny Baker and Alan Lemons, chose to portray Civil War ancestors so as to "tell the story" of the history of that period. Kenny is from Alabama and Alan from Illinois. As the two began their research, they found that Kenny's ancestor had joined the 16th Alabama Infantry, Wood's Brigade, while Alan's forebear had served in the 49th Illinois, McClernand's Brigade. Further investigation revealed both ancestors' units had fought at Shiloh. At the suggestion of their professors, the two students undertook a careful study of the battle only to learn that their ancestors had literally confronted each other for two days during the battle. Needless to say, the entire class became keenly aware of issues which had once divided the nation and of how the country has been reunited. At the request of the class, a trip was organized during the Christmas vacation to visit Shiloh Battlefield.

In a less dramatic fashion the class has confronted male/female gender issues and issues arising from different backgrounds. Some of the class members have always lived in the area, with family roots reaching back to 1810; others have followed the modern American pattern of migration demanded by jobs, and a few are military dependents who

have lived all over the world. A frank admission and examination of this diversity within the context of the region they now all call home has led to a better understanding of American Commonality.

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